

Safety planning for promotoras: Research facts





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Promotoras and **community health workers (CHWs)**¹ can be a life changing and lifesaving resource to Latin@ survivors of domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV).

While research on safety planning with Latin@ communities is limited, existing research supports a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach. A strengths-based approach empowers community members with information about IPV, shares local resources, and emphasizes choice and agency. Emphasizing choice includes understanding that survivors may not want or be able to leave abusive situations. Safety planning should be unique to every survivor.

How to support survivors with research-supported safety planning (Sabri et al., 2021):

- Assess individual needs, including those of family and children
- Provide IPV education
- Identify threats to both physical and emotional safety
- Connect survivors to local and national resources
- Offer long-term support and follow-up

What is a safety plan?

A **safety plan** is a personalized strategy designed to help individuals in unhealthy or abusive relationships, as well as their families, maintain boundaries and safely exit dangerous or unsafe situations. Safety plans are essential whether a person is dating, in a relationship, or living with someone who has used violence or has left an abusive relationship—recently or years ago. Safety plans are unique to each individual and family and they are flexible and should be adjusted as circumstances change.

Esperanza United has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people or groups that are gender neutral or both masculine and feminine. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that women, men, and gender-nonconforming people make to our communities.

¹ Promotoras, also referred to as community health workers, are professionals that provide health education and bring resources to communities. They act as a liaison between institutions and community members and are trusted members of the community with culturally specific knowledge based on ethnicity, language, culture, and community needs and understanding (Cáceres et al., 2022).



Focusing on survivor and community strengths during safety planning is empowering

Parental monitoring: Research with Latin@ youth exposed to IPV found greater maternal monitoring was associated with more positive youth mental health outcomes (Mariscal, 2020)

Social support and school connectedness: More social support (e.g., family and peers) and connectedness to school were associated with better mental health outcomes among Latin@ teens who experienced dating violence (Sabina et al., 2022)

Finding and building on strengths using Mariscal and colleagues' (2022) Latin@ strengths-based culturally responsive model by:

- Asking about the survivor's hopes and aspirations
- Recognizing that survivors lead the process, using their preferred language and words
- Listening for and building on survivors' skills, talents, and strengths, such as community support, as they share experiences, stories, and cultural lore and wisdom. Biculturalism and ethnic pride can be assets that help survivors navigate adversity

Safety planning and Latin@s

- Brief empowerment sessions ranging from 10-25 minutes prevented future IPV in research with Latina survivors (Sabri et al., 2021)
- Apps can support safety planning among teens and adults (Diaz-Ramos, Alvarez, and Debnam, 2021; Glass et al., 2022)
- Research has found Latin@/Hispanic adolescents are more likely to safety plan with friends, offer non-judgmental support to peers, and use de-escalating behaviors (2013; Sargent et al., 2017)
- Advocacy for immigrant survivors often involves informing them of their legal rights. Safety planning should consider that U-Visa and T-Visa applications can take two years or longer to process. For unmarried individuals under 21 in the U.S. without parental support, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) offers a pathway to a green card for those who have experienced trauma and/or neglect. Recommendations from Encuentro Latino National Institute on Family Violence for safety planning with immigrant survivors (2015) include:
 - ▶ Explore alternatives to calling the police
 - ▶ Provide culturally specific resources that do not require identification or disclosure of immigrant status and offer education about laws and systems in the U.S.
 - ▶ Understand risks and barriers faced by undocumented or mixed status families



- ▶ Engage an immigration lawyer or legal advocate for support
- ▶ Ensure bilingual staff or translators are available when providing resources and referrals in legal, healthcare, and shelter/housing services. Be familiar with local mandatory interpretation/translation laws and policies
- ▶ Avoid having family or children interpret for the survivors

Assessing individual needs and barriers to support

- **Caribbean, Afro Latin@, and indigenous Latin@s** are underrepresented in IPV research and often face unique barriers, including discrimination from within and outside their communities and limited access to formal support (Garza et al., 2024; Macias et al., 2024). For more information, see Esperanza United's [Call to action for inclusive gender-based violence services for Black and Afro-Latin@s](#) and our [Call to action for culturally specific gender-based violence services for Indigenous Latin@ communities](#)
- **Rural survivors and agricultural workers** may live and work in areas with fewer resources than urban spaces. See Esperanza United's [Gender-Based Violence and Latin@ Farmworkers](#), for more information
- **Survivors with disabilities** experience a 40% higher rate of IPV than non-disabled individuals (Hughes et al., 2012). Barriers to support include transportation, accessible media resources, and concerns about losing needed caretakers or services (NCADV, 2020). Unique forms of abuse these survivors experience include misuse of medications, financial abuse, and limiting access to communication and mobility devices (YWCA, 2019). The 2005 Violence Against women Act (VAWA) reauthorization expanded protections to survivors with disabilities (NCADV, 2020)
- **Latin@ LGBTQIA2S+² survivors** are also underrepresented in research but resources like Esperanza United's [Safety planning to support Latin@ LGBTQ survivors](#) are available to support advocacy. Key findings that can support safety planning include:
 - ▶ LGBTQIA2S+ youth and adults experience IPV at similar or higher rates compared to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts (HRC Foundation, 2022)
 - ▶ LGBTQIA2S+ men may be less likely to seek informal support from peers and family than women, while women may have less trust in formal supports like the police (Guadalupe-Diaz, 2013)

2 Acronym that represents people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and/or 2 Spirit. The '+' is a symbol used to reflect that language is constantly evolving and expanding, and there are many sexual orientations and gender identities out there that are still a part of the community even if they are not represented in this acronym.



- ▶ Transgender individuals are at elevated risk for IPV and gender-based homicide, facing unique barriers and discrimination when seeking help for IPV and hate crimes (Macias et al., 2024)
- ▶ A recent study found that among transgender IPV survivors, no undocumented respondents sought help from a shelter or rape crisis center; they were also the group most likely to state they avoided those services because they feared a transphobic response (Messinger, Kurdyla, & Guadalupe-Diaz, 2022)

Ideas for safety planning

- **Safe word:** Develop a safe word or phrase with a trusted friend or family member to tell them you would like them to send help
- **Exit points:** Identify safe exits in your home and note areas to avoid, such as rooms with no exits or access to weapons
- **Safe locations:** Know several safe places where you could go for help, like a 24-hour gas station or friend's house
- **Emergency bag:** Prepare a bag with important documents (e.g., identification, immigration paperwork), a change of clothes, medications, and any legal paperwork. Include documents from your home country if necessary
- **Financial safety:** Set money aside, if possible, either in cash or a separate bank account
- **Pet safety:** Plan how to bring your pets with you or remove them from the unsafe situation
- **Memorize phone numbers:** Prioritize the numbers of trusted friends and family
- **Auto-replies:** Set up auto-replies on your smartphone to quickly alert trusted contacts to send help to your home address

Safety planning for parents with children

- **Child safety plan:** Discuss a safety plan with your children for both home and school
- **Emergency contacts:** Arrange for a friend or family member to pick up your children from school if you cannot. Update emergency contact forms at school to ensure your children are released only to certain people
- **Healthy relationships:** Have ongoing conversations with your teens about what healthy relationships look like



Education and safety planning tools

[The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) provides [interactive safety plans](#), education, and confidential support over phone, text, and online chat. Hotline resources are available in Spanish. **1.800.799.SAFE (7233)**

[The RAINN hotline](#), live chat, and [smartphone app](#) gives survivors of sexual violence and their support network access to support, self-care-tools, and education. **1.800.656.HOPE (4673)**

[My Plan](#) is an app that supports safety planning and identifying local resources. The app is disguised as a leaf icon and a PIN is needed to open the plan. It is available in English and Spanish.

Other mobile resources are available at [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org).

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